

## **CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR MICHIGAN STATE PARKS**

Thursday, February 28, 2008

MSU Diagnostic Center for Population and Animal Health  
Lansing, Michigan

### ***MINUTES***

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Murdock Jemerson, Chair  
Betsy Clark  
Mike Foote  
Chris Graham  
Jim Hendricks  
Robert Hoffmeyer  
Kathy Lewand  
Mike McDonald  
Chuck Nelson  
Bill Rose  
Todd Scott

#### **MEMBERS ABSENT**

Tom Ferguson, Vice Chair  
Tom Bailey  
James Bradley  
Rev. Hurley Coleman, Jr.  
Mary Pitcher

#### **EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mary Brown  
Sandra Clark

#### **EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT**

April Bennett  
Michael Bryanton  
Duncan Wyeth

#### **DNR STAFF PRESENT**

Ron Olson, Chief, DNR Parks and Recreation (PRD)  
Vicki Anthes, PRD  
George Cameron, PRD  
Tony Herek, PRD  
Harold Herta, PRD  
Yolanda Taylor, PRD  
Other PRD Staff

#### **INTRODUCTIONS**

Chair Murdock Jemerson called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m., with introductions and an overview of the meeting agenda. Chair Jemerson announced that the committee will first hear a presentation on the status of the PRD Strategic Planning process, and then break out into subcommittee working sessions to discuss 2007 accomplishments and 2008 goals and objectives for the remainder of the morning session.

Chair Jemerson also announced that he received a resignation letter from Thomas Bailey. He mentioned that Mr. Bailey expressed his concern for not being able to attend and participate in committee's meetings on a regular basis due to other business and personal commitments, and

felt it would be best for the committee to step down at this time. This leaves a vacancy on the committee, which will be addressed by the department.

### **PARKS AND RECREATION STRATEGIC PLAN**

Paul Curtis, the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan Coordinator, gave a presentation to the entire committee regarding the status of the strategic planning process, outreach efforts made thus far, tentative timeline for completion, and next steps. He asked that each subcommittee review the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic planning documents, and incorporate them into their subcommittee's 2008 goals and objectives.

### **PARKS AND RECREATION PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL REPORTS**

Chair Jemerson announced that they will adjust the agenda, and first listen to a financial update presentation by Tony Herek, PRD Program Services Section Chief, before moving into the finance subcommittee's working session.

Tony Herek gave a brief overview on PRD's Fiscal Year 2008 funding sources. He identified variables that can have a daily effect on the state park's budget, to include revenues, appropriations, infrastructure and emergency repairs, gas prices, and economics, to name a few. He gave comparisons on the status of the State Park Improvement Fund, beginning in Fiscal Year 2004, and where the projected balance will be by the end of Fiscal Year 2009. He identified the cuts, reductions, and cost savings implemented by the PRD to continue operations through Fiscal Year 2007, into Fiscal Year 2009, without having to close any state parks or layoff employees.

Regardless of all the cost savings made and spending plans proposed for Fiscal Years 2008 and 2009, to make up the projected \$5.3 million deficit, it is still projected that there will be no more funds available to continue operations by the end of Fiscal Year 2009, without a long-term sustainable funding source. Also, despite the savings made so far, the state parks' annual \$40 million for infrastructure repairs, improvements and replacements still needs to be addressed.

Chuck Nelson, committee member and chair of the finance subcommittee, stated that this committee really needs to address the state park endowment fund, much sooner rather than later, as it makes up only 19% of the state park's budget.

DNR Director Rebecca Humphries made a surprise appearance to address and update the committee regarding the status of the department's budget. Several questions were raised regarding the status of the department's budget, especially as it relates to the surplus found in the game and fish fund. The Director was more than happy to address and answer all their questions. She announced that monthly budget reports will now be provided at all future Natural Resources Commission (NRC) meetings, and will be posted on the NRC's website. The committee thanked the Director for attending this meeting, updating them on the status of the Department's budget, and for answering the questions in an honest and forthright manner.

Chair Jemerson announced that he had to excuse himself for another meeting, and turned the regular meeting over to committee Secretary Betsy Clark to chair.

Secretary Clark called the regular meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. with roll call and an overview of the meeting agenda. She announced that the new Ex-Officio member, Michael Bryanton, was not able to attend. Introductions will be made at the next meeting.

### **PUBLIC APPEARANCES**

John Heiam, President of the Grand Traverse Hiking Club (GTHC), introduced himself and explained to the committee that the hiking club is a part of the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) Chapter, a non-profit organization striving to build, maintain, protect and promote the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST). This trail stretches from New York to North Dakota, and is expected to reach an astounding 4,600 miles when completed. Currently, 1,100 miles are located in Michigan, and this chapter is responsible for developing and maintaining the NCNST in Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Wexford and Manistee Counties, including parts of the Pere Marquette State Forest. The GTHC maintains approximately 90 miles of hiking trail in the Grand Traverse region.

Mr. Heiam explained that, almost 2 years ago, this group presented a proposal to the DNR to create a trailhead in Kalkaska that would not only link the scenic trail, but also provide a shower and grocery store across the street for hiking enthusiasts. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the Department's process, restrictions (that include staffing and funding restrictions), and delays with getting proposals through the process. When he heard about this committee's license plate proposal, he took it to his group, members of the local community, and other organizations and received overwhelming support. He commented that this proposal would also provide an avenue for trail funding and development, and asked the committee how his organization could help support and promote this proposal.

Discussions ensued regarding the department's application process for the proposed development of trails or trailheads. Chris Graham, committee member, asked that Chief Olson work with the appropriate department staff to find out what the process is for trail applications and identify the delays and restrictions with the process. Ron Olson responded that this program is administered by the Forest, Mineral and Fire Management Division, but stated he would follow-up with them regarding the process, reasons for delays, and if there are any funding issues or restrictions.

Jim Hendricks, committee member, suggested Mr. Heiam, any members of his organization, club, and those in his local community, contact their legislator(s) to advocate support of this proposal.

**Marne Smiley**, the new Executive Director of the Michigan Mountain Biking Association (MMBA) was present for this meeting. She introduced herself, mentioned that she has attended every meeting since her appointment, and expressed her personal interest in being an MMBA representative on this committee. The committee congratulated her on her appointment, thanked

her for her strong interest in this committee and in becoming a member, and will pass that information on to the appointing committee for consideration.

### **ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

The Minutes from the November 28, 2007 meeting were not available. Secretary Clark tabled the approval of the Minutes for the next meeting.

### **LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE FUNDING STATUS**

Chuck Nelson, committee member and chair of the finance subcommittee, opened discussions on the status of the license plate proposal and the need to still address long-term sustainable funding alternatives, as there is no long-term sustainable funding on the table right now, for the PRD and the department. He reminded the committee of various alternatives proposed by the Conservation Summit; however, those efforts have stalled.

As far as the license plate proposal is concerned, Chuck Nelson, commented that this committee still needs to push forward on this proposal. Anywhere this proposal has been presented, it has received overwhelming support from various groups, organizations, committees, the general public, and even the press.

He gave an overview of the finance subcommittee's 2007 accomplishments, and 2008 goals and objectives, which will be more formally presented with the minutes. Some of the major goals for 2008 for this committee will be to push this proposal forward by more formally appearing on the scene, making more contact with and influencing individual groups, organizations, local government agencies and communities, legislators, etc. Other avenues discussed would include reinvigorating the efforts of the Conservation Summit and working with them to get this proposal moving forward; the legislative committee that is in the process of being formed (by Senator McManus) to look at long-term sustainable funding, especially since our Chair, Murdock Jemerson, will be the representative on this committee; and getting the Michigan State Park Foundation reestablished.

Discussions continued regarding this committee's next steps, and that emphasis needs to be placed on the entire outreach effort, the essence of the plan, making contacts, etc. It was agreed that this committee needs to come up with talking points or a Frequently Asked Questions document, a strategy, contacts, and a timeline for moving this proposal forward, as well as getting the information out to the public.

Some suggestions made were to use this committee's website as a means of disseminating this information, holding public meetings, contacting various legislators, finding a sponsor, and getting on various legislative committee agendas to present this proposal.

Bill Rose commented that this committee needs to build a strategy and identify the roles of the entire committee and each committee member.

It was agreed that, before the next meeting, each member will commit to contacting a legislator, formally or informally, to discuss this proposal.

Chris Graham commented that he would like to know more about 1) the McManus legislative committee that is being formed, and 2) if there are any ways to open the door with the appropriations committee members.

One plan discussed would be to have the Chair send formal letters to the house and senate appropriations committees and subcommittee chairs and their members, introducing this committee and its purpose, its members, notifying them that they will be contacted to discuss the license plate proposal, and asking them to be placed on a future agenda.

Betsy Clark commented that this committee needs good talking points so that the proposal can be presented in a concise manner.

Todd Scott commented that it needs to be made clear that this is different from the game and fish fund, as many people are confused or unaware that the state park's budget has nothing to do with the game and fish fund. He also commented that it needs to be made clear to the public how the parks can continue to operate through the end of Fiscal Year 2009, but that the forecast is not good.

Sandra Clark pointed out that, when presenting this proposal and the status of the state park's budget, it is very important to not totally focus on what we're trying to maintain, but also identify and clarify where the division has been, where they are going, what the future goals and plans are for the state parks, communities, tourism, etc. People want to give money to build Michigan's future, and that should be one of the major focuses. Quality of life and tourism are very important to Michigan's future.

Chris Graham also suggested that this committee and park staff need to educate the public on the status of the park's budget, what changes and cuts have been made to continue operating, and what the future holds for the state parks system and funding. He asked that a narrative, historical document be prepared to highlight what has transpired since general funds were cut out of the state's budget, with a picture of the remainder of the fiscal year and beyond.

Bill Rose further commented that, for credibility, we need to explain why we said we were going to have to close state parks, why it didn't have to occur, but that the state park's future is still in jeopardy, and identify the needs.

In summary, some of the needs and steps identified and agreed upon include:

- A list of key legislators, committees, and their members.
- A list of key organizations, groups, stakeholders, etc.
- A strategy and timeline for moving this proposal forward, to include outreach efforts.
- Talking points, frequently asked questions, and a historical narrative for this proposal and the history/future of the state park's budget and future operations.

- Making this information available to the public.
- Sending letters to, and contacting key legislators, house and senate appropriations committees and subcommittee chairs, and getting on their agendas to present this proposal.
- Educate our own staff so that they can address and answer questions regarding this proposal and the future of the state parks system and budget.
- Holding public, information meetings to present this proposal and educate the public.
- Post more information on this committee's website, such as monthly financial reports, the license plate proposal, talking points, FAQ, historical narratives regarding the state park's budget, infrastructure needs, and the future of state parks).

It was agreed that the above requests for information will be provided, and further discussions about the license plate proposal and a strategy to move this forward will be discussed at the next meeting.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION REPORTS AND UPDATES**

### **Good Things**

Chief Olson announced that he would table this portion of the agenda to allow time for other agenda items and discussions.

### **MRPA Awards**

Chief Olson announced that he would table this portion of the agenda to allow time for other agenda items and discussions.

### **Porkies Ski Lodge Update**

There were no updates to provide at this time.

### **Legislative Update**

Harold Herta, PRD's Resource Management Section Chief, asked to address House Bill 5189 in his report. This bill is recommending that the department give disabled veterans (considered to be 100% disabled) and veterans of war free access and free camping to all state parks and recreation areas and free camping. Mr. Herta commented that this bill will have a significant impact on the parks and recreation's revenue stream, and this bill is moving quickly through the legislature. He further mentioned that this will also have an effect on the central reservation system, and how we are going to verify "disabled" via call-in or on-line reservations.

Ron Olson commented that this causes a whole lot of confusion and questions regarding how to define "100% disabled," and could eventually lead to all disabled individuals or all military personnel requesting free access.

Discussions continued regarding this bill, the definition of “100% disabled, the management and verification via the central reservation system, and this committee’s position on this bill.

Chuck Nelson, committee member, motioned that this committee oppose this bill as written, but support this bill if there was a mechanism in place to supplement the lost revenue via general fund reimbursement; Mike McDonald seconded the motion; there were no objections and the motion carried. Chuck Nelson and Harold Herta will prepare a resolution for this committee’s consideration and adoption at the next meeting.

### **Land Issues**

Ron Olson gave an overview of the Eight Point Lake waterways issue as provided in the report. A special meeting of the Michigan State Waterways Commission is being scheduled to specifically address Eight Point Lake. An update will be provided to this committee pending the outcome of this meeting.

### **Summary of 2007 Events/2008 Events thru March, 2008**

There were no discussions or questions about this report.

### **PARKS AND RECREATION PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL REPORTS**

Tony Herek, the PRD Program Services Section Chief, announced that most of the information was provided in his presentation to the finance subcommittee earlier in the morning, but is willing to entertain any additional questions or comments about the report provided.

Ron Olson commented that revenues are up, but campnights are down about 4.4% compared to this same time last year. At this time, it is not clear if this is a result of people making delayed choices, especially in-lieu of the increasing gas prices.

Harold Herta commented that the call center is going to be extremely busy, beginning today and tomorrow, as reservations are now open for the Labor Day weekend.

There were no additional questions or comments regarding these reports.

### **WORKING SESSION OF THE ENTIRE COMMITTEE**

Secretary Clark asked each subcommittee Chair to give an overview of the 2007 accomplishments, and 2008 goals and objectives that they came up with in their morning sessions.

Each subcommittee Chair gave a brief overview of their accomplishments, goals and objectives and will provide them in writing for the next meeting.

Kathy Lewand, Co-Chair of the Marketing and Interpretation subcommittee, made a comment that this subcommittee has grown very small, and welcomes anybody who is interested to join and participate on this subcommittee.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Mike McDonald, committee member, asked to briefly address the MNRTF report. He mentioned that this was presented to the MNRTF at their February 20 meeting, and this was the first time that the MNRTF Board heard of or saw this report. It is his understanding that the recommendation is to get this through the legislature for the August primary to open up the MNRTF Act for the purposes mentioned within the report. He further commented that none of our recreation associations, none of the MNRTF Board members, or any DNR staff were ever contacted or consulted regarding this proposal by The Nature Conservancy and Public Sector Consultants.

Mike McDonald also mentioned that this proposal is also being presented to the Michigan Recreation and Park Association at their March 7 meeting.

Rich Bowman, Director of Government Relations for The Nature Conservancy, was contacted and asked to make a presentation to this committee at their next meeting. Mr. Bowman has accepted and will be placed on the March meeting agenda.

Todd Scott, committee member, announced that Senate Bill 1069 (introduced by Senator Stamas on January 31, 2008), gives state tax credits for one-half of the state equalized value, up to \$10,000 per year, to anybody that donates land to the DNR for recreational purposes. This bill will be provided to the committee for their review and possible discussion at their next meeting.

Mary Brown, ex-officio member and Natural Resources Commissioner, handed out the minutes of the NRC Policy Committee on Parks and Recreation's February 7 meeting. She suggested that this committee submit items of interest to this NRC Policy Committee if there are items not on the calendar for consideration this year that they would like this committee to address.

## **CLOSING COMMENTS/NEXT MEETING/LOCATION**

Sandra Clark, ex-officio member, cautioned the finance subcommittee against their 2008 goal of establishing 501c friends groups. Based on her personal experience working with non-profit organizations, she commented that too many 501c groups or organizations tend to cause a lot of confusion regarding roles, and conflicting interests. She suggested this committee consider one 501c umbrella organization, which they have in the Michigan State Parks Foundation, once it is reestablished.

Mary Brown, ex-officio member, also cautioned against 501c3 non-profits, as they are under more restrictions.



It was the consensus of the committee to ask Ron Olson to follow up with the Executive Office, find out what the status is and push it up to the Governor's Office to get this foundation reestablished, staffed and up and running in the near future. Ron Olson agreed and said he would follow up with the Executive Office.

George Cameron, the PRD Chief of Field Operations, commented that another plus would be when the PRD hires a fundraiser. They could work with the friends groups.

Secretary Clark asked the committee if there was any more business; there were no other comments or discussions. Secretary Clark adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m.